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ABSTRACT

Imbalances existing between theoretical and practical research and between experimental and naturalistic research can be corrected by teacher educators who conduct research on what they are already doing as part of their professional assignments. These educators are persons whose expertise typically includes several years in the classroom prior to their teacher education work in higher education; they are in a unique position relative to the issues of theory and practice. Reasons for looking to teacher educators to augment the level of research activity in classrooms are based on the opportunity to link research and practice, to study teaching as it naturally occurs, and to foster a healthy research attitude in the profession. A study in which a teacher educator researched the student teaching experience (while functioning as the subjects' university supervisor) demonstrates the feasibility of such research. Positive outcomes of this dual role included: (1) easier entry into the field setting and relationship building; (2) positive effects of the event and its participants; (3) negation of the "halo effect"; and (4) improved ability to carry out both the role of researcher and university supervisor. (JD)

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A CHALLENGE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY:
Teacher Educator as Researcher

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A Challenge for the 21st Century: Teacher Educator as Researcher

INTRODUCTION

The educational literature of the 20th century reflects a genuine lack of balance in at least two major areas: 1) that which exists between theoretical and practical research, and 2) that which exists between quantitative and qualitative research. Addressing the former, Robert Davis (1977) cast the idea this way:

> Practitioners do know something, and a major stage in science occurs when theorists study practitioner's knowledge and try to relate it to theoretical modes of thought. This stage has been by-passed by education. Teaching is studied with the implicit assumption that teachers do not know what they are doing and theorists must come in and tell them (p.67).

Davis argues that without knowing what the practitioners know we have only a partial picture, hence, the cyle of educational research is incomplete.

The second imbalance in 20th century research: the overwhelming dominance of the psychometric paradigm, exists in nearly every area of

educational research. As Rist (1977) explained:

> We are not dealing with a situation of parity among the various research methodologies. Quantitative research is <u>the</u> dominant methodology in educational research. It is more widely taught, published, accepted and rewarded in educational circles than any other approach (p.42).

Brophy, summarizing the studies conducted during the 1970's and 1980's, concludes that while we know much about process-outcome relationships we know very little about process-process relationships. We know which teacher behaviors affect student learning, though we don't know <u>why</u> they affect student learning. Brophy asserts that we now need a storehouse of thick descriptions of classrooms; naturalistic studies that examine the reasons underlying process-outcome relationships.

This paper will argue that to complete the research cycle the imbalances existing between theoretical and practical research and between experimental and naturalistic research can and should be corrected in the 21st Century. Furthermore, it will be argued that these imbalances can be corrected by teacher educators who research what they are already doing as part of their professional assignments.

TEACHER EDUCATOR/RESEARCHER

Professors of elementary, secondary and/or teacher education whose

primary professional activity is working with pre and inservice teachers are ideally suited to conduct naturalistic studies. They are on the scene, interested in the problems and virtually classroom wise. They are capable, hard working people who engage in teaching, an occasional development project (teacher education or school curriculum) and writing (expository articles, texts for teachers or school learners) though they have seldom engaged in a research study since the completion of their respective dissertations. Therefore, they are in a position to study teaching and teachers teaching in the classroom.

There are at least two good reasons why this suggestion is plausible. First, these are persons whose experience typically includes several years in the classroom prior to their teacher education work in higher education; they are in a unique position relative to the issues of theory and practice. There is perhaps no other set of professionals who has such a unique opportunity for linking research and practice, while also having the responsibility to do so.

The matter of responsibility is the second reason for recruiting teacher educators to conduct classroom research in the 21st century. Though the typical teacher educator is not anti-research, she frequently communicates two things that may instill an anti-research attitude in the teacher. First, by not being actively engaged in research the teacher educator is indirectly diminishing its significance as a useful domain of teaching. Second, the teacher educator's inclination to have answers to, but not questions about, problems of practice tends to convey that teaching is a dogma-based rather than science-based activity. Hence, reasons for looking to teacher educators to augment the level of research activity in

classrooms are based on the opportunity to link research and practice, to study teaching as it naturally occurs and to foster a healthy research attitude in the profession.

PARTICIPANT OBSERVER/UNIVERSITY SUPERVISOR

That teacher educators can and should conduct classroom research is not only plausible but possible. In a 1981 study (replicated in 1982 and 1983) a teacher educator working with preservice teachers at a large midwestern university (and later at a small liberal arts college), assumed the dual role of researcher and university supervisor. The researcher both studied and supervised the student teachers that served as her subjects.

The purpose of the study was to describe and analyze the student teaching experience from the perspective of the student teacher. In order to describe an event from the perspective of the participants in the event, one must:

> actively participate in the life of the observed over a period of time and must be able to build and understanding of both the inner and outer perspectives of human behavior (Bruyn, 1976, p.9).

For this reason the author chose participant observation as her methodology. It is a field strategy, often used by ethnographers, which involves social interaction in the field with the subjects of the study, direct observation of relevant events, collection of documents and artifacts, and an open-endedness in whatever directions

the study takes (McCall and Simmons, 1969).

The researcher found this methodology compatible with her role as university supervisor. Like the participant observer, the university supervisor observes the preservice teacher on-the-spot in the natural, ongoing environment where she lives and works. The duties of the university supervisor call for social interaction in the school and in the classrooms (in the form of conferencing and interviewing student teachers), direct observation of relevant teaching and classroom events (on-the-spot observing), collection of documents and artifacts (in the form of lesson plans, etc.), and an open-endedness in the direction the experience takes for the student teacher.

While the enactment of the roles was similar, the purpose of each differed. The participant observer studied student teaching in order to describe and analyze it from the perspective of the student teacher; the university supervisor studied it in order to maximize the growth and development of the student teacher. Despite the differing purposes, the roles were compatible enough that the assumption of the dual role by the teacher educator had little, if any, impact on the student teacher. One of the subjects commented on this compatibility:

> Actually...I've never really separated this study from...my clinic professor [i.e. university supervisor]. I'm not sure what's being done for the study and what's being done for the ...program. So, I've meshed them together and just consider everything important for her to know.

SOME POSITIVE OUTCOMES OF TEACHER EDUCATOR AS RESEARCHER

The assumption of the dual role of researcher/university supervisor resulted in a number of positive outcomes that appear significant.

1. As a university supervisor entry into the field setting and relationship building with the subjects were easier.
2. The probability of any halo effect occurring was mitigated by the nature of the supervisory role.
3. The researcher reported positive influences on her ability to better enact both the role of field researcher and university supervisor.
4. The assumption of the dual role had a positive effect on the context of the event and on the participants in the event.
5. The assumption of the dual role did not adversely affect the investigation.

As university supervisor for the subjects of the study, the researcher found entry into the field setting and relationship building with the subjects (two initial problems facing a participant observer) much easier: the student teachers expected to be supervised and observed on a regular basis and they expected their supervisor to play an active part in their experience. Secondly, the halo effect (i.e. the influence of merely participating in a research study with its resulting attention) was mitigated in this study by the very nature of the supervisory role. The subjects were already familiar with the

"extra attention" they received, and they were familiar with being observed and interviewed on a regular basis.

Third, the researcher reported that the assumption of the dual role had a positive influence on her ability to enact both the role of participant observer and that of university supervisor. Her responsibility as university supervisor influenced the type of participant observer she became; her curiosity as participant observer ultimately influenced the type of university supervisor she became. As the student teachers' supervisor the researcher was unable to assume a "passive" participant observer role; it was impossible to remain detached from the events to prohibit any influence on the events. Therefore, the researcher assumed an "active" participant observer role influencing the event and observing that influence. This active involvement was instrumental in understanding the student teachers' perspective of the student teaching experience. The researcher also reported a positive influence on the enactment of her university supervisor role. A participant observer assumes an "objective" view of a social situation. In seeking this objectivity, to make the familiar strange, the researcher came to see and understand more of the situation, in greater depth and from a different perspective than in her previous years of experience as a university supervisor. Working to continually maintain the professional distance of a participant observer, she was able to see potential problems developing, consequently, she was able to intervene in a preventive mode. The researcher/teacher educator firmly believed that through the assumption of the dual role of

participant observer/university supervisor, she improved and extended her skills in both areas.

Lastly, the researcher reported that the assumption of the dual role had a positive effect on both the context of the event and the participants in the event. In clinical work where the subject is studied during a transition or change period (such as student teaching), the clinician's participation is used to both evoke change and to provide information. It was the nature of the university supervisor role to evoke change in the student teacher and in the context of her student teaching experience. Assuming the role of researcher allowed the university supervisor to use systematic data/information as the basis for guiding and recommending change. The subjects benefited and their student teaching experiences were enhanced by this duality. This positive influence is illustrated by the following case record:

> I really like writing and thinking about these questionnaires. In a way, they've become my "guided journal". I haven't felt inhibited to write my feelings and frustrations down. I know that what I write will be kept confidential and also that what I write or say won't be used "against" me. I'd almost like to see questionnaires of this sort continued. It's good feedback for [university supervisor] to know. It does take me several hours for each questionnaire since I tend to write volumes. Usually, I'd write

out questionnaires before lesson plans because 1) I enjoyed them more, 2) I got more out of them, and 3) sometimes I could incorporate some ideas into my lesson plans. So yes, this study has influenced my teaching.

SUMMARY

This paper is posed as a challenge for teacher educators to conduct classroom studies in the 21st century. The heart of the challenge is for teacher educators to research what they are already doing as part of their professional assignments. Teacher educators work closely with pre and inservice teachers on a regular basis, possess that unique blend of theory and practice and are in a postion to study teaching as it occurs in its natural setting. The discussion of the Sitter study, in which the teacher educator researched the student teaching experience from the perspective of the student teacher while functioning as the subjects' university supervisor, demonstrates the feasibility of such research.

The primary obstacles in accepting this challenge are the necessity of possessing field research knowledge and skills and negotiating load-time with academic administration. Each is significant, but given the need to complete the educational research cycle, worthy of consideration. If only 10% of the teacher educators, whose immediate clients are pre and inservice teachers, conducted and reported one classroom study per year, the research literature would soon reflect a more optimal blalance between theoretical and practical research and between experimental and naturalistic studies.

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